

Interview With Derk Haank, CEO, Springer Science+Business Media:

Not Looking for Sympathy

by Richard Poynder

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Vol. 28 No. 1 — Jan. 2011

A well-regarded and talented publisher, Derk Haank is a key player in an industry that currently faces a number of difficult and interlinked challenges. Some of these include addressing the so-called **serials crisis**, completing the migration to an online environment without revenue hemorrhage, and meeting the growing calls for publicly funded research to be freely available online, aka the open access (**OA**) movement.

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After achieving prominence as chairman of **Elsevier Science**, Haank was poached in 2004 to head Springer, the company formed by private equity firms **Candover** and **Cinven** when they **merged** BertelsmannSpringer and Kluwer Academic Press. (Subsequently, Springer has been sold to private equity firms **EQT** and **GIC**).

Haank has proven to be a bold and creative CEO. When other publishers have portrayed OA as a pipe dream, Haank launched the world's first **hybrid OA** initiative (**Open Choice**), **acquiring** the world's largest OA publisher (**BioMed Central**) and creating a series of Springer-branded pure OA journals (**SpringerOpen**). In short, while his competitors have hidden in their tents and plotted, Haank has shown that he is (as he puts it) "not afraid to respond to OA."

Haank is unfailingly courteous and brings to any conversation a delightfully mordant sense of humor. He also gives the impression of being someone who would never panic or make rash decisions, however daring. Qualities such as these are essential in today's challenging environment. Haank characterized 2009 as a "very challenging year" for the **STM** publishing industry and expects conditions to remain so for several years.

But what struck me in speaking to Haank is that he believes OA publishing (**Gold OA**) will never be more than a niche activity, despite embracing it vigorously. He also expressed concern over the current trend for institutions and research funders to introduce **mandates** requiring researchers to **self-archive** (**Green OA**), which he believes could destroy the scholarly publishing system.

I was likewise struck by his views on the **serials crisis**, which he says was resolved in the 1990s, after publishers introduced the **Big Deal**. Librarians will surely disagree. Haank responds by pointing out that the number of papers published each year continues to grow at 6% to 7%. Consequently, he says prices must inevitably rise a little each year. And he is confident the research community will eventually agree, since "scientists have to have sufficient funding to keep abreast of new developments." As such, he says the current difficulties are cyclical, not structural. He adds that librarians' current fad for publicly berating publishers overpricing is simply a canny negotiating strategy intended to put pressure on publishers. While this makes life more difficult, he says he is not looking for sympathy. Here then is our conversation, which has been edited for style.

In Retrospect

Q: When I spoke to you in 2004, you expected Springer to have an IPO in a couple of years' time. That did not happen. Instead, we saw Springer bid for Informa, Informa try to buy Springer, and then, in December 2009, Springer was sold on to two new private equity firms—EQT and GIC. What happened?

A: The background is that in 2004, we **merged** BertelsmannSpringer and Kluwer Academic Publishers to create the new Springer. During that process, we drew up a list of things we wanted to do. By 2007, we had worked our way through that list and were achieving our financial targets. So at that point, we explored a number of options with the owners [Candover and Cinven].

We did seriously consider taking the IPO route, but in light of the financial situation, we decided it would be much easier to take out more bank loans and keep the company.

Q: It wasn't that you felt Springer might not attract a good price?

A: No. We could have sold the company, but then we would have given up ownership of it. And given the very favorable financial conditions that then prevailed, we decided it made more sense for our owners to keep Springer. Bear in mind that at the time, there were no financial clouds on the horizon, and everyone thought it would carry on like that. The banks were offering more financing, and ever better conditions. So we delayed the IPO.

Q: In retrospect, Candover and Cinven might wish they had had an IPO in 2007?

A: In retrospect, we are all rich!

Q: At some point, Springer's loans became a problem. In 2009, for instance, *The Times* reported that the company had debts of 2.16 billion Euro, and that this was acting as a disincentive to prospective purchasers.

A: What happened was that we increased our debts in very favorable conditions in 2007, and while we were able to pay the interest without any difficulty, the whole financial climate changed. Suddenly, the same banks that had given us the money in the first place now felt we were over leveraged.

That gave us two options: Candover and/or Cinven could put some more of their own money in Springer, or we could sell the company on to another private equity firm able to treat it as a new venture. In the event, we ended up with EQT as a majority owner and GIC as a minority owner. That allowed us to deleverage, and today our balance sheet is again in line with the latest financial fashion.

Q: Financial fashions aside, market conditions for Springer are not looking great are they? The company's annual report for 2009 shows that Springer's revenues fell from 859 million Euro in 2008, to 845 million in 2009, and it described 2009 as a "very challenging year." STM markets, it added, are being affected "by the global recession and constrained governmental budgets." The fundamental problem you face is that libraries are struggling to pay for your products?

A: Yes, 2009 was a challenging year for the STM industry. Everybody was holding their breath. We could see that discretionary spending—additional print books for example—was slowing, and that the market was very difficult. But our industry was a beacon of stability compared to most industries!

Q: How are market conditions today?

A: What we have experienced in 2010 is not so much that things are back to normal, but that conditions are recovering, and we are seeing decent growth again. Conditions are not easy, but there is no crisis.

Q: What is your current growth rate?

A: We are no longer seeing the double-digit growth of the past, but we are seeing a 3% of turnover growth on the bottom line. If that continues in the years ahead, I think we can all make a decent living. We are, however, bracing ourselves for the fact that over the next 2 to 3 years, market conditions will continue to be difficult, because the general financial crisis has turned into a government financial crisis and, as you know, part of our business is directly or indirectly dependent on government funding. So our task is to work out how we can continue to get our products to our customers in an environment where money is not plentiful.

Price Increases

Q: How are you doing that?

A: One of the things about the current market situation is that it provides an incentive for libraries to accelerate their move from paper to electronic, both journals and books.

This would have happened anyway; libraries have been migrating to the electronic environment for the last 10 to 15 years, but right now, we are seeing an increase in the cancellation of print products and a corresponding acceleration in the take up of econtent because there is a financial incentive to do so. This helps libraries because e-products are much less expensive to handle: They have no storage costs, the data comes with a catalogue, and our books come with MARC records.

Q: Librarians tend to paint a somewhat gloomier picture than you, one that includes tales of cancellations, massive cuts, and unsympathetic publishers demanding ever higher prices.

A: True, and when Springer was being sold, all our prospective buyers read reports full of similar stories of doom and gloom, especially in the U.S. All I can do is base what I say on the facts, and what I see happening; and I can tell you that there have been no massive cancellations.

Q: Librarians have complained about a "serials crisis" for decades. Publishers responded by packaging large bundles of journals in electronic form: the so-called Big Deal. The Big Deal, however, has been widely criticized, and many believe its days are numbered. When I interviewed you in 2002 (when you were chairman of Elsevier Science), you said, "The Big Deal has had some bad press, but in principle there is nothing wrong with it." Is that still your view?

A: Absolutely. The Big Deal is the best invention since sliced bread. I agree that there was once a serial pricing problem; I have never denied there was a problem. But it was the Big Deal that solved it.

Q: How?

A: It did two things. First, it corrected everything that went wrong in the serials crisis in one go: people were able to get back all the journals that they had had to cancel, and they gained access to even more journals in the process.

Second, electronic publishing reduces the overall costs of publishing, since distribution costs become virtually nil. We could never have offered the Big Deal in the paper world. So in inventing it, we publishers made absolutely perfect use of new technology in a way that benefited both ourselves and our customers.

Q: Why then do librarians still mutter darkly about the Big Deal?

A: It is all part of the process of negotiating with publishers. The truth is that it is in the interests of everyone—publishers and librarians—to keep the Big Deal going.

However, for publishers, it means having to control ourselves when it comes to price increases, and from what I can see, everybody is now doing that. If you look at the public reports of both Springer and our colleagues, you will see that price increases are very close to inflation now.

Q: At what rate are Springer's prices rising currently?

A: We are struggling to get a few percent more out of our existing customer base today. Given the library budget pressure, this is a real concern going forward.

Q: Librarians insist that they continue to be plagued by price increases. You are saying that the serials crisis is over?

A: The serials crisis refers to a situation that existed at the end of the 1990s, when we saw big increases well above inflation. Those days are long gone, and I strongly feel that our products now offer value for money. In fact, the cost per unit has fallen, and in the last 10 years, libraries have gotten more and more for the same money.

Q: When publishers are challenged about pricing, they invariably say that libraries are now getting more for less. Librarians say that the problem is not unit prices but the fact that overall costs keep going up. They have static or falling budgets, they say, and there is a limit to how much they can pay.

A: Look, the reality is that our journals are growing in volume by 6% to 7% per year. We have been doing all that is possible over the last couple of year, and will continue to do so to ensure that our price increases are lower than the volume increases. But not increasing our prices is not an option in the long term.

Librarians need to accept that if they want access to a continually growing database, then costs will need to go up a little bit but not like in the days of the serials crisis. We try to accommodate our customers, but at a certain point, we will hit a wall.

Structural or cyclical?

Q: I wonder if you are portraying what is essentially a structural problem as a cyclical problem. Has the scholarly communication system simply become too expensive to support? Might it therefore be in danger of falling apart? Are we not at least approaching the point where cash-strapped libraries will find they can afford to buy access to less and less published research?

A: No, no, no. I don't believe there is a structural problem, and things will not fall apart. There are always countervailing forces. I don't believe that our pricing is a big problem, and I am sure that this market can carry on indefinitely. As I say, I accept that there was once a problem. But today, we can't give libraries access to any more journals because they already have access to all they could ever want.

Of course, if you predict that the whole world is about to collapse, it is possible that it may do so. However, over time, I expect people will realize that scientists have to have sufficient funding to keep abreast of new developments.

Q: Again, I doubt librarians would agree that publishers are showing price restraint. As you will know, the University of California (UC) Libraries recently released a public statement complaining that Nature was seeking to increase its license for 67 journals by 400%. For that reason, UC Libraries said, they were considering boycotting NPG.

A: I would not want to comment on this particular example; there might be a reason for it. You know, what is sometimes forgotten in discussions like this is that we operate in a growth industry: For the last couple of hundred years, we have seen a constant growth in research. More research means more researchers (because it is very labor intensive activity), and around every 2 years, each researcher produces a scientific article. That is the volume problem, and there is nothing we can do about it. So this is an enormous growth industry, and it is just not realistic to assume that there will be no price increase in the next 10 years for our growing database. One thing we have learned, however, is that the days when publishers could just say, "This is the price increase and you have to pay us" are no more.

Q: What implications do you think public statements like the one made by UC Libraries will have on the relationship between librarians and publishers?

A: In general, I think it is very healthy for people to negotiate and to use different tactics when doing so. It keeps sanity in the whole system. So I see it as a sign of a more healthy business relationship.

However, while I am not looking for sympathy, it shows that publishers face a double challenge when negotiating with libraries: Like any vendor, we have to engage in a chain of discussions knowing there is always the danger the other side may walk away from the table. Unlike other vendors, we also have to accept that our customers may appeal to public sympathy to help their case. So where in most other industries customers could put out a press release and no one would notice for us it is different, there is always potential public interest in the products we sell.

No One Is Indispensable

Q: You no doubt also saw the open letter signed by a number of directors and associate directors of Chinese libraries, including the National Library of China and Peking University Library. That letter also

complains about journal price rises. Among other things, it says: "To our dismay and anger, a few international STM publishers, using their monopolistic position, recently demand to raise the subscription prices for their full-text database at a yearly rate of more than 14% for the next 3 years, despite the fact that their prices have already had a yearly increase of more than 10% in the last contract period." Is Springer implicated in these charges? Do these libraries have a genuine grievance?

A: I don't believe that they are referring to Springer, because these are not percentages I recognize. But it seems the Chinese have learned the habit of negotiating via the press!

I would also point out that Chinese libraries should really expect to pay their fair share of the total system. I don't think one ought to want to dominate all kinds of fields globally, while at the same time continually pleading poverty.

Q: Your point is that these librarians want scholarly publishers to continue treating China as a developing country, and so sell journals to them at discounted rates?

A: Yes. In my view, there are many countries in much greater need of assistance than China today. In the good old days, the Chinese paid peanuts for having the same access as European countries. That needs to be corrected over time because China has come a long way. But you have to admire them for trying to play their cards in whatever way suits them best. I would also point out that it is always easy to talk about dramatic percentage increases if you take your comparison from a low base.

Q: I understand Springer has entered into quite a few cooperation agreements with Chinese publishers and authors and has created the Frontiers in China series. How do you view this relationship developing? Do you have any sense that Chinese publishers are growing stronger and may eventually want to do things without your help?

A: That is always possible. There is no point in denying that the world is changing. I find it a very interesting development, and certainly expect Latin America, India, and China to grow faster than Europe or the U.S. That means we need to be active in all these areas, because if we don't do anything, it is certain that one day companies originating from these areas will indeed take over.

Q: You want to try and make yourself indispensable before that happens?

A: No one is indispensable! The cemetery is full of people who are indispensable, Richard. We will try our best to hang on in there. But are we sure we will survive? No. What I do know is that we will not survive if we do *not* become active in these areas.

Open Access

Q: Let's talk about open access (OA). When you moved to Springer from Elsevier in 2004, one of your first decisions was to launch Open Choice. This allows scientists to pay \$3,000 to have their research paper made freely available on the web and introduced what is now called hybrid OA to the world. Since then, most if not all, subscription publishers have followed suit. Subsequently, in 2008, Springer bought OA publisher BioMed Central (BMC), an acquisition that made Springer the world's largest OA publisher in one fell swoop. What was the attraction of BioMed Central?

A: It was twofold. First, BioMed Central's area of activity—life sciences and biomedicine—is an area that Springer had been wanting to get into for some time. It was a gap in our program that BioMed Central could fill.

Second, we could see that OA was increasing, and given our reputation, we felt that we were well-positioned to become the leading player in the OA area.

Q: When Springer bought BioMed Central, the press release quoted you saying, "This acquisition reinforces the fact that we see open access publishing as a sustainable part of STM publishing, and not an ideological crusade." When I spoke to BioMed Central's founder Vitek Tracz recently, he too used the word "sustainable." Neither of you used the word "profitable." Is BioMed Central profitable?

A: Yes, BioMed Central has a very healthy margin, more than double digits. It is not marginally profitable but a very sound business.

Q: Can you expand on that?

A: Perhaps in our next interview!

Q: How much did Springer pay for BioMed Central?

A: I don't think we ever disclosed the figure. Let's just say that we allowed Vitek to recoup all of his assets.

Q: What you say implies that he didn't make money from BioMed Central, merely recovered his costs?

A: I would say that was accurate. But he has sold some of his other products to other companies far more profitably, that's for sure.

Q: Do you see any signs that the leaders of Elsevier, Wiley-Blackwell, Wolters-Kluwer, and Taylor & Francis are persuaded that OA publishing is profitable. If BioMed Central (BMC) is profitable, why are they proving so slow to follow Springer's example and embrace non-hybrid Gold OA? If they're not impressed by BMC's profitability, is it because BMC's margins pale in comparison to their own?

A: Maybe they don't sufficiently value the opportunity to provide additional possibilities for their authors. I don't know. It could also be that our disadvantage became our advantage. We had nothing to lose, because we didn't have a presence in that field.

Q: You mean in the biomedical field?

A: Yes. We had a gap in our program, so for us, perhaps it took less courage to say, "OK, let's go down the OA route because we have less to lose."

Q: Then in 2010, you announced SpringerOpen, and launched a series of pure OA (Gold) journals. You are clearly now serious about OA. When I spoke to you in 2004, however, I inferred that Open Choice was simply intended to call the bluff of the OA movement. As you put it, "Let them put their money where their mouth is." Would it be accurate to say you are a sceptic turned convert with regard to OA?

A: The truth is that I have always been neutral on OA. What we were trying to do in offering Open Choice was to take the heat out of the debate, because at that point, there was a danger that the world would become divided between the do-gooders that supported OA, and the bad commercial boys hanging on to an old-fashioned publishing model. As I recall in those days, I also used to say that OA is here to stay because I could see that a few people were really determined to use the model.

For me, OA is just a business model, and I have never understood all the emotion aroused by it. Call that skepticism if you want, but what I was really saying to you in 2004 was that I was not afraid to respond to OA. And frankly, I was also intrigued to see what would happen.

Q: On hearing about SpringerOpen, one researcher commented to me: "Doesn't Springer own BioMed Central? Why are they competing with it?" What is the answer?

A: The answer is that there are a few funding bodies who only want to pay for publication if the paper goes into a pure OA journal rather than a hybrid journal. Our response was, "So be it, the customer is king." SpringerOpen is therefore the last brick in our OA building.

Q: BioMed Central's journals are pure OA, of course.

A: Correct. And we are not using Biomed Central's journals for this because it publishes exclusively in the biomedical field, so its name would be a disadvantage. It wouldn't make sense for us to publish a mathematics or physics journal under the BMC umbrella. We are, however, using BioMed Central's systems and infrastructure.

Q: You say that OA is now sustainable. What about subscription publishing: Is that also sustainable over time?

A: Yes, the one doesn't exclude the other. But let's put this in perspective: BioMed Central is a very nice company, and we are very pleased with it, so for us, it is a meaningful part of the business. However, in the context of more than a million articles being published each year, it is just a drop in the ocean. You can be individually successful with OA at BioMed Central, or even at Springer, but that doesn't mean that the whole industry is about to change.

Niche

Q: On that note, in 2004, you said to IWR, "I'd be surprised if in five years' time more than 5-10% of our articles have been published by author-pays." How does that figure look today?

A: I think I said it would never be more than 5% of the total number of articles published. But whether I said it was 4% or 9% I don't know; certainly it was of that magnitude.

Q: Were you right?

A: Let's say that I haven't been proven wrong. Currently the industry publishes about 2% of all articles under the OA model, although uptake is increasing rapidly so it might be 2.5% in 2010.

Q: It is higher than 2% at Springer.

A: Of course. We have our hybrid model and currently about 1.5% of all our articles are published under the hybrid model, and we own BioMed Central, which publishes something like 15,000 articles a year. If you take the combination of Springer's hybrid OA output and BioMed Central, more than 10% of our articles are published under an OA model today. That is a meaningful part of our business. But as I say, it is just a drop in the ocean.

Q: But it is growing: Springer's Annual Report indicates that OA grew by more than 20% at the company in 2009. That is mainly BioMed Central I assume?

A: Yes, it is mainly BioMed Central, which is growing very fast. But it also includes the hybrid model.

Q: And we can expect SpringerOpen to have an impact on those figures going forward. However, I get the feeling that you don't anticipate OA will become the dominant publishing model.

A: Correct. I am absolutely convinced that the traditional subscription model delivered through the intermediary services of the library or information department will remain the dominant model. You might be forgiven for thinking that the OA movement is a lot bigger than it is. That is because those people who want to change something are always more vocal than those who are happy with the way things are.

Q: Why are you so sure subscription publishing will remain the dominant model?

A: Because there simply isn't enough incentive to change the system. Most people who need access to research information are much better off today than they were 10 to 15 years ago. Things might not be perfect, and some believe we ought to take the ultimate step and publish everything open access, but the reality is that—outside the biomedical field—most people just don't see a sufficient problem for OA to become a big movement.

Don't get me wrong: I am by no means dismissing OA. I like it, and it is a good for our business, so I want to see it grow. But in my opinion, it will always be a niche, and the predominant method will continue to be a variation on the subscription model. Today, OA publishing accounts for 2% of a market that grows by more than 4% every year. That is not exactly a revolution is it?

Q: How large a niche do you envisage OA being?

A: I expect it to remain between 5% and 10% at a maximum.

Q: I'm wondering if the pricing issue might not drive take-up of OA. It occurs to me that the Big Deal would not be needed in an OA world.

A: It wouldn't make any difference to total costs if the whole world was OA, because as I said, each year more articles are published. Consequently, even if publishers sought no price increase for themselves, costs would still need to rise by 6% to 7% each year. That is the volume increase problem.

Q: Many assumed that OA publishing would prove less expensive than subscription-based publishing. Is that not the case?

A: OA makes no material difference to pricing because most of the functions remain exactly the same. You could argue that OA allows you to dispense with print costs, but even under the subscription model, there is hardly any print any more.

Likewise, you could argue that you don't have to sell subscriptions with OA publishing. But OA requires selling institutional memberships. So whether the library pays for the system through subscriptions, or the institution pays author charges via membership schemes, it makes not a jot of difference to the overall costs in the end.

Green OA

Q: We have focused on OA publishing or Gold OA. There is also Green OA, or self-archiving, where researchers continue publishing in subscription journals but then make copies of their papers freely available in an institutional or central repository such as PubMed Central. Some argue that this is a faster and more effective way of providing OA. And most subscription publishers consent to some form of self-archiving. As I understand it, Springer allows authors to self-archive the "author-created" versions of their papers in their institutional repository, but not Springer's PDF.

A: We have always tried to take a balanced view on this, so we are of the opinion that, in principle, author archiving is fine. Were self-archiving ever to become sufficiently professional that it began to mimic our journals, however, it could create a lot of problems. If that were to happen why would people continue to take out a subscription?

But we are such a long way from that situation today that we are very easy going about author archiving. Since we cannot see it destroying the system, we see no reason to make life miserable for our valued authors.

Q: Nevertheless, many publishers, and publisher trade organisations such as the Association of American Publishers (AAP), actively lobby against OA mandates such as the Public Access Policy introduced by the US National Institutes of Health (NIH). They also lobby against proposed legislation like the Federal Research Public Access Act (FRPAA)? Does Springer lobby against green OA?

A: I draw a distinction between author archiving and mandatory OA requirements such as the NIH Public Access Policy where they don't allow for a sufficient embargo.

Q: So does Springer lobby against OA mandates?

A: Yes, because OA mandates institutionalise the process of author archiving, and if the delay between publication and archiving is only a couple of months, then there is a real danger of destroying the equilibrium that we have achieved over OA.

Q: How would you characterize that equilibrium?

A: The compromise that we have reached is to keep the traditional subscription system while combining it with pure OA, plus a little bit of Green. In my view, that model is good enough, and it is really not worth risking it by introducing mandatory OA policies requiring papers to be made freely available within 6 months.

Q: So your view is that self-archiving should be voluntary not mandatory, but if it really has to be mandatory, it should allow a healthy time lag between publication and self-archiving?

A: There has to be a time lag. Otherwise, publishers will have no choice but to go fully OA. That could create a very messy situation and possibly destroy the current system.

Q: What is the ideal embargo period?

A: I would say 12 months. In the meantime, the author is free to put his own version on his website. That makes it immediately free but not in an institutionalized manner.

Open Data, Ebooks

Q: Some researchers argue that OA is not enough; they also want open data. The Cambridge-based chemist Peter Murray-Rust, for instance, wants scholarly publishers not only to make research papers freely available, but all the supplementary data associated with scientific papers too, even if the paper is published in a subscription journal. Moreover, he wants that data to be made available free of copyright restrictions so that others can re-use it. Is that a reasonable request in your view?

A: I have some sympathy for the request. However, I am not convinced that, even if every publisher were to make all such data freely available tomorrow, open data would take off very quickly, not least because only a tiny minority of articles have this supplementary information.

So I am not against the principle that if we publish an article, be it subscription-based or OA—any relevant data attached to it should be made freely available.

Q: And you are happy for the data to be made available on a reuse basis so that people can, say, mash it up?

A: I am. I see very little downside to doing it, because at the end of the day, it would progress scientific research, which is what we are all here for, and from which we will all ultimately benefit. And I am not worried about the commercial aspects because in reality, we are only talking about a tiny subset of the total number of articles we publish. But it is just not a pressing issue today. Occasionally, the topic is raised, and we all say, "Yes, we should definitely do something about that"; and then the issue goes away again.

Q: Let's turn to books. Springer says it now has the world's largest portfolio of scientific ebooks (nearly 40,000). The feedback I receive from users is very positive. As one librarian put it, "Springer's model is one the industry should study carefully and emulate in many ways." Some, however, say that while the costs are reasonable, there could be more transparency over pricing. I think prices are agreed via secret negotiations. What's wrong with a simple price list?

A: Actually, there is a price list. But the truth of the matter is that every librarian today is pleading poverty, and so they always negotiate the prices down. You may call that secrecy; I would argue that it is just the normal way of doing business.

Q: Most libraries buy Springer's ebooks for less than the list price?

A: Unfortunately yes. But we were keen to get the product off the ground, and attractive pricing always helps to establish new products.

Q: Am I right in thinking that you sell your ebooks in big-deal type packages?

A: A more friendly way of describing it would be to say that libraries are given a volume discount.

Q: How many eBook packages are there?

A: We offer 13 separate collections, and libraries can shift between the different packages. There is also less pressure on libraries to renew every year than with journals. Consequently, a library might decide to buy a Springer ebook package in 2010, and then pass on it in 2011. I hope they don't do that of, course, but it is much more do-able than with journals, because if you miss a year's subscription to a journal, you have a gap in your programme, which looks silly. In practice, this means that by definition libraries have to commit to a long-term spending agreement with journals.

Q: Some humanities publishers have begun experimenting with OA books. This usually consists of providing free digital copies of the books, but selling print versions. Can you see Springer adopting an OA model for its books?

A: I am glad people are experimenting, because if it is a success I am sure we will follow. But to be honest, we haven't given any thought to such a model. Nor are we in a hurry to do so as we don't want to confuse the market with multiple products.

The Future

Q: Looking to the future, what new developments can we expect from Springer?

A: Our first priority is to continue as we are. When you talk about all the new things going on, there is a temptation to forget that. But it is my job to think of what more can be done. As we have discussed, there is great pressure on the traditional library market. So we need to look at nontraditional markets.

Q: What kind of nontraditional markets?

A: Essentially, the nontraditional market is everybody outside the university library who is interested in information. The problem is that 80% of what we publish is academic information, and companies are not intrinsically interested in it. But we hope to explore possibilities. After all, we are seeding our database with 13,000 to 14,000 new pages of

information every day.

With an expanding database like that, we should be able to find ways of offering products in a format, and with a business model, that is more attractive to non-traditional markets than in the past. We might want to look at emerging countries, for instance, and at individual markets. That is something we hope to look at in the next 5 years. But the first priority is to make our products more accessible. That means developing a better search engine, and improving the formatting of our data.

Q: You hope to sell Springer information to individuals?

A: Yes. I am thinking of people who are not scientists but who might be willing to pay small sums of money for the information that we can provide. So while we will continue to sell and licence our products to universities and other research institutions, we would also like to sell information to individuals.

We could be looking at small consultants, for instance, or businesses; it doesn't really matter. I don't know about you, but I am rapidly becoming addicted to the iPad. Perhaps the iPad will help here.

Q: Scholarly publishers tend to sell single articles for around \$25 a time. That is not an iPad pricing model, and it is not a price I suspect many individuals would be willing to pay.

A: So maybe we will need to realign our prices there.

A shorter version of this interview appears in the January issue of Information Today. Richard Poynder, a freelance journalist based in the U.K., writes about information technology, telecommunications, and intellectual property with a special emphasis on online services and open access issues. Send your comments about this article to itletters@infotoday.com.
